

VZCZCXRO4033
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHJI #0416 2731459
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291459Z SEP 08
FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0932
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 1343
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 8058

C O N F I D E N T I A L JEDDAH 000416

SIPDIS

RIYADH PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/29/2018

TAGS: ELAB PHUM SCUL SA

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIANS POSING AS MUSLIMS AND CROSSING YEMENI BORDER TO WORK IN SAUDI ARABIA

REF: 08JEDDAH148

Classified By: CG Martin Quinn for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: An Ethiopian diplomat says that many illegal Ethiopian Christian workers enter Saudi Arabia by posing as Muslims to get pilgrimage visas. Other illegal workers are smuggled through the porous Saudi-Yemeni border. Saudi police raids on illegal residents among the Ethiopian community are alleged to have become common practice. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Poloff met on August 25 with Ethiopian Consul Muktar Muhamad, who detailed recent trends in Ethiopian migration to Saudi Arabia. He shared that there are now 80-100 thousand Ethiopians in the Kingdom, with 60-70 percent of the workers being illegal, many having overstayed Hajj or Umrah visas in the hope of finding work. The majority of the laborers are female domestic workers.

¶3. (C) Muktar noted that 30 percent of the Ethiopian workers are Christian, most being Orthodox and the minority Protestant. He claims that many Christians pose as Muslims at the Saudi Arabian Embassy in Addis Ababa in order to get Hajj or Umrah pilgrimage visas. The Saudi Embassy screens all of the applicants, but is not able to fully detect many of those posing as Christians. A small number of Protestant Ethiopians attempt to proselytize Saudis (non-Muslim proselytizing is strictly illegal in Saudi Arabia), acts which anger or worry other Ethiopians who fear reprisal from the authorities.

¶4. (C) Another source of illegal Ethiopian immigration comes from the porous border with Yemen. Muktar notes that a small number of those crossing include drug and alcohol smugglers. He claims the Saudis have shot six to eight Ethiopians attempting to cross during the last year, despite the fact that some of these individuals were not smugglers. NOTE: Saudi security officials have told Post that policing the Yemeni border is extremely difficult, and that human traffic includes children, many of whom end up in child beggar rings (Reftel). END NOTE.

¶5. (C) Muktar stated that between thirty and forty thousand Ethiopians are deported annually, usually discovered in police raids of residential areas. He pointed out that there have been a few instances of Ethiopians being killed during these incidents. The overall number of workers is not depleted because more workers continue to arrive. Those on Hajj or Umrah visas arrive in Saudi with a return ticket, but they let it expire in almost all of the cases where they intentionally overstay knowing that once they are deported, Saudi Arabia will pay for the return flight. If illegal workers are found carrying any money, they are required to use their funds to pay for the flight.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Post is not aware that the Ethiopian consul's claim that Christians are posing as Muslims in order to work illegally in Saudi Arabia has been previously documented among laborers coming from other countries. END COMMENT.

QUINN